



**CITY OF MONROVIA
LIBRARY BOARD
AGENDA REPORT**



DEPARTMENT: Community Services
Library Division

MEETING DATE: April 13, 2014

PREPARED BY: Rebecca Elder,
Youth Services Librarian II

AGENDA LOCATION: AR-2

TITLE: 2013-14 Play with Me Program Evaluation

OBJECTIVE: To present the Library Board with an evaluation of *Play with Me* Program.

BACKGROUND: Public libraries continue to position themselves to support families, child care providers, and communities to help every child enter school ready to learn to read. The Library's Youth Services program, *Play with Me* is based on key resources and activities that support early literacy. Early literacy refers to what children know about reading and writing before they can actually read and write. It is not the teaching of reading, but instead, involves the building of a foundation for reading so when children are taught to read, they will be ready. Early literacy theory emphasizes the more natural unfolding of skills through the enjoyment of books, the importance of positive interactions between young children and adults, and the critical role of literacy-rich experiences.

Research confirms that the first five years are particularly important for the development of a child's brain, and the first three years are the most critical. Early childhood experiences affect the area of the brain responsible for higher-order thinking, and children need to have rich experiences that stimulate all of their senses. For a child, play is a critical path to those experiences that engage their senses and provide the foundation for future learning.

The *Play with Me* program draws upon information from the *Every Child Ready to Read @ your library* initiative, from the *Public Library Association*, and from the *Association for the Library Service to Children Association for Children*. These resources focus on educating parents, and caregivers of children newborn to age five on early literacy so that they can help their children enter school ready to learn to read. If the primary adults in a child's life can learn more about the importance of early literacy and how to nurture pre-reading skills at home, the effect of library efforts can be multiplied many times. Early literacy activities can also serve to enhance the position of libraries as centers of learning for pre-school age children and their families.

ANALYSIS:

In 2013, staff became proactive in communicating early literacy research information and skills to parents, caregivers and children, by offering the weekly early literacy program, *Play with Me*. The program was based on the six pre-reading skills of *Every Child Ready to Read* curriculum, which provided examples of how adults can help children acquire those skills: print motivation; vocabulary; print awareness; letter knowledge; narrative skills; and phonological awareness.

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Prior to early literacy initiatives staff was reading aloud to children and modeling for parents how to read aloud to their children. Songs and finger plays were shared, but were selected for their support of the theme of the story time rather than for the literacy components they offer – such as the pattern and rhythm of language. Staff recognized that reading aloud was important, and with current substantiated research and supporting curriculum were able to offer literacy-enhanced story times, and support for parents as their child’s first teacher. Parents became partners in providing experiences to present the six pre-reading skills for 0-5 years. Traditional story time transformed into an early literacy enhanced story time.

Logistics and Design: Staff assessed the space and logistics of the youth services area and story time room, and divided it into several centers: transportation, building blocks, dramatic play, post-office, writing center, and infant play. Age appropriate and developmentally appropriate toys, manipulatives, writing activities, and board books were purchased to facilitate creative play between parent/caregiver and child. The program consists of free play, where parents and children converse with one another as well as other adults and children. Children are free to move from one location to another for discovery. Clean up-time song transitions participants into the story time room, and culminates with story, song, and movement activity. Large Post-it notes with words to songs, and finger plays are posted on the walls for parents to use their mobile phones to photograph/record activities to practice at home. Books selected are colorful with simple language. Staff uses dialogic reading techniques to engage both parents/caregivers and children at all age levels, and solicit feedback and conversation using open ended questions. Rhymes and songs are used to enhance language experiences. “Parent asides” are used as tips staff offer parents/caregivers to extend early literacy activities and educational tools for use at home. Teen Advisory Board volunteers clean toys after each weekly use.

In 2014, staff began offering a “smart art” activity for several weeks as an additional component of the *Play With Me* program, in order to provide parents/caregivers and children opportunities to have hands on early literacy art activities. These activities provide a model for parents/caregivers to extend their experiences to use at home.

Statistics: The following table outlines the number of programs and attendance by year:

Year	Number of Programs	Total Attendance
2013	21	1,682
2014	28	2,210

Surveys: Informal and formal surveys are distributed to participants rating the *Play with Me* Program.

Formal survey results indicated the following:

- 98% of participants indicated they learned new skill sets that will assist them in the areas of early literacy.
- 99% of participants spend more time playing rhyming activities.
- 88% of participants indicated they were more likely to check out books at the library.

- 97% of participants indicated they spend more time singing.
- 98% of participants indicated they spend more time talking.

Informal survey results were overwhelmingly positive. Participants complimented staff on age appropriate content; materials selection; developmentally appropriate toys; smart art; program design; and creativity. Some comments parents/caregivers shared with staff were:

“Thank you for the enriching activities”

“Big thanks to the librarian and teen volunteers”

“Love this program”

“Art activities are phenomenal”

“My son attends school in France, and this is the model they use for early learning”

COMMUNITY BENEFIT: According to psychologist David Elkind, children have lost eight hours of free, unstructured and spontaneous play a week over the last two decades. Play is rapidly disappearing from communities. Research has shown that “place” matters, meaning that where children live, go to school, and play can powerfully affect their health outcomes and life opportunities, and as a community space, Monrovia Public Library is providing a place to support those outcomes and opportunities through family engagement.

FISCAL IMPACT: Story times are considered a regular part of library programming and business practice; there are no additional costs associated with these visits. The *Play with Me* program materials, including crafts and play apparatus, are funded through donations from the Friends of the Monrovia Public Library, saving the City \$3,000.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: There are no environmental impacts associated with this report.

STAFF COMMENTS:

1. Staff will continue to develop best practices for early literacy programming based on current research on brain development.
2. Staff will investigate a partnership with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) local chapter to promote library services.

RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends the Library Board move to receive and file AR-2 Play with Me Program Evaluation.

LIBRARY BOARD ACTION REQUIRED: If the Library Board concurs, the appropriate action would be a motion to: *Receive and file, AR-2 Play with Me Evaluation.*

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